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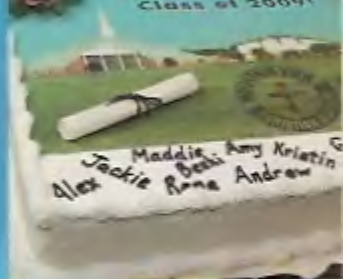

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Shooting Sugar

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Ann Marie B. Haase

Ann Marie is an avid cake decorator living in upstate New York. She has reviewed cake-decorating and baking books for ACD since it was founded in 1995, making her the longest tenured member of the ACD family. She is active in ICES, and currently serves as the New York state representative.

Nicholas Lodge

Nicholas Lodge has served on the faculty of two of the U.K.'s most prestigious sugarcraft schools and has written or collaborated on more than a dozen books. He founded the International School of Sugar and Confectionery Arts in Norcross, Ga., and retails equipment and supplies through the International Sugar Art Collection. www.nicholaslodge.com.

MaryAnn Moy-Hochstetler

MaryAnn Moy Hochstetler is a pastry chef who has been involved in cake decorating for more than 9 years. She currently teaches at the Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology's culinary program. She enjoys competition, most notably the Oklahoma State Sugar Art Show and Upper Midwest Bakers Convention. A recent design of MaryAnn's was selected to appear in the Brides magazine 75th anniversary edition.

Laurél Silverberg

Laurél Silverberg is a Le Cordon Bleu trained chef and has more than 20 years experience in the pastry business. She is an active member if ICES, and a former member of its board of directors. She created a patented process for food-safe rubber stamping and currently teaches an adaption of Donna Dewberry's one-stroke painting technique for sugar and chocolate through her company, the Sweet Palette.

Steven Stellingwerf

Steven Stellingwerf has 30 years of cake decorating experience. He is a member of the Wilton Hall of Fame and was named to the President's Club for teaching more than 1000 students. He has served as the ICES South Dakota state representative and has served two terms on the organization's board of directors. He has authored two books: The Gingerbread Book and Perfectly Simple Muffins.

Bronwen Weber

Bronwen is executive pastry chef at Frosted Art Bakery in Dallas, Texas. Previously, she trained pastry chefs at a Texas culinary school and managed the bakery units for a small grocery chain. She was the 2005 grand prize winner at the Grand National Wedding Cake Competition in Oklahoma, and has been a frequent competitor in Food Network Challenges, earning multiple gold medals.

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The Mice Have It!

By the time you read this note, I am sure that you have been waiting for this issue to arrive for some time. Before going any farther, please let me apologize for this. We are sorry to have kept you waiting for so long.

A benefit of the wait, however is that I was able to include a couple of pretty impressive designs from the "That Takes the Cake!" show in Austin, Texas. I was fortunate enough to have been asked to participate in the show, and came home with pictures of many wonderful cakes. You can find a taste of them on this page and on page 59, where the Best of Show winners are displayed.

It was my privilege to have spent the better part of two days working on a judging panel with Carolyn Wanke Mangold and Roland Winbeckler. I will leave you with a picture of a cake that had both Roland and me transfixed as we combed through the detail. I guess the best way to sum it up is that this cake made me smile!

Craig Gustafson
Editor in Chief

Craig by Kimberly Chapman

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MODERN CLASSIC

Classic designs with a modern spin create a fresh, hip look.

cake Nicholas Lodge photos Scott Ewing

{Essential Elements}

18 x 1/2-inch square cake drum
14-inch square masonite/wood board
6 pounds rolled-fondant icing (AUI)
14 x 4-inch round cake tier
8 x 4-inch square cake tier
7 x 4-inch round cake tier
4 x 4-inch square cake tier
Cake boards to match tier sizes
Support system
Piping gel
Bench scraper
Piping tip: #1 (PME)
4mm black dragées
Gel Coloring:
super black (Americolor)
Gumpaste
Gum glue
Royal Icing Mix or
10x Sugar/Meringue Powder
Chic Rose Stencil Mat
(Designer Stencils)
Damask and Grosgrain
Textured Rollers (Sweet Art)
Pearl Mold 6, 8, and 10mm
(First Impression Molds)
Medallion Mold #5
(First Impression Molds)
Pattern (page 46)
Straight Frill
#3 cutter set (FMM)
Decorative Cutter Set (FMM)
Funky Letter
Cutter Set (FMM)
Multi Ribbon Cutter (FMM)
Fruit and Flowers
Cutter Set (FMM)
Paisley Insert
Cutter Set (ISAC)
Mini palette knife
General Gumpaste tools
Pasta machine
(Kitchen Aid)

Sweet!

All items required for this cake are available from International Sugar Art Collection by Nicholas Lodge. His recipes for gumpaste and edible glue are posted for free on his web site, nicholaslodge.com or 800/662-8925.

{board}

1. Mix icing for the stencil by using either 1 cup of royal icing mix, or 1 cup powdered sugar combined with 2 heaping teaspoons of meringue powder. Stir by hand with 2 teaspoons water for 1 minute, then add 1 teaspoon of black gel coloring. Mix well, cover with a damp cloth, and set aside.

Nicholas Suggests: Royal icing made in a mixer is too fluffy to use with a stencil. If pastel coloring is desired, use less gel coloring and a little more water.

2. Hot glue a 14-inch Masonite/wooden board to the underside of an 18-inch square drum for strength and to provide finger space below the drum. Spread a very thin layer of piping gel over the drum and set it aside. Knead and roll out 2 1/2 pounds of fondant onto powdered sugar, making it a little larger than the 18-inch drum. Smooth and polish the fondant using a fondant smoother, and roll the icing up onto a rolling pin. Unroll the fondant onto the drum and polish again, using a pin to deflate any air bubbles. Trim the edge of the board with a mini palette knife and save the excess fondant. Cut out a 14-inch circle using the cardboard circle, which will be used under the base tier, as a pattern. After removing the icing from the center, it can be saved for future use, as the piping gel does not change its quality, taste or consistency.

Nicholas Suggests: I prefer Massa Americana rolled fondant by Albert Uster Imports - especially for stenciling as it does not dry out as quickly as other fondants. Stencils grip the fresh fondant, allowing a longer time period to work without slippage. This fondant rolls extremely thin—covering a four-tiered wedding cake, including the board, used 6 pounds. It is, however, a softer fondant and may require additional powdered sugar for rolling.

3. Immediately position the stencil over the freshly covered board. Press down on the stencil with a fondant smoother to adhere it to the surface of the fondant. Press firmly—straight down—do not rub. Rubbing with the smoother forces fondant up through the stencil, filling the cavities. Spread stencil icing over the top of the stencil using an offset spatula. Skim across the top with a bench scraper to remove excess icing. Using a cosmetic sponge, texture the wet icing lightly to give it a velvety appearance. Carefully remove the stencil. Wash the stencil gently under running water and air-dry on a towel. Rubbing the stencil while washing or drying may damage it.

4. Allow the board to dry for at least 30 minutes, then re-trim the outer edges. Cover and stencil the board at least 24 hours prior to working with the cake to avoid damaging the board. If there are places in the stenciling that seem thin, additional icing can be applied with a small art brush. Prepare the cakes. Bevel the top of a 4-inch square cake tier to stand 4 inches tall at the back edge, dropping to 2 inches tall at the front edge. Cover each of the three largest tiers with white rolled fondant icing and the square 4-inch tier with black.

{base tier}

5 Stack the tiers on the cake board using an adequate support system. Combine 7 ounces of fondant with 3 ounces of gumpaste and a little shortening to make 70/30 paste. Roll half of the 70/30 paste into a sausage, then flatten it enough to run through a pasta machine on setting No. 2. Rub a little shortening onto the work surface and lay down the strip of paste. Cut a decorative scalloped design along one edge using a Straight Frill Cutter—a continuous cutter for making decorations of any length. It will be easier to apply if this strip is made in 2 sections. Trim the strip to 3/4 inch wide and cut out eyelet holes from the scallops using the end of tip #7. Run a mini palette knife under the strip to loosen it from the work surface.

Nicholas Suggests: Stress-Free Cake Supports provide an extremely stable structure for assembling a cake, while keeping the number of legs penetrating the cake to a minimum.

6 Carefully turn the strip over and place it around the base of the tier. Brush the strip with a little edible glue and flip it onto the cake using the mini palette knife. Finish encircling the tier with a second strip. At the seams, pipe a little royal icing to fill in. Pipe a small dot of piping gel into each eyelet hole and insert a 4mm black dragée. Finish the base by piping a small shell border using black royal icing and a tip #3.

7 Roll out black gumpaste and pass it through the pasta machine on setting No. 5. Cut out paisley designs from the Decorative Design set. Cut pieces in pairs, turning one over to create a mirror image of the first. Attach the pieces to the side of the tier in a random pattern using a small amount of edible glue. Roll out more black and white gumpaste on setting No. 5 and use the Paisley Insert Cutter Set as well as the piping end of tip #12. To cut a variety of shapes. Attach these paisley inserts and discs to the top of the first set of paisley designs using edible glue.

8 Once the layered paisley decorations are dry, pipe royal icing ornamentation on them with tip #1. Add 4mm black dragées to the decorations with a dot of piping gel. Let the stencil design and the paisley pieces inspire your own ideas for piping.

9.

10.

11.

12.

9 Knead, roll, and press black 50/50 paste into a medallion mold using a Dresden tool. If any excess paste rises above the mold, trim it flush with scissors before unmolding. Flex the mold to remove the medallion. Hollow the center using a small ball tool, then insert a 4mm white pearl or a small ball of white gumpaste into the cavity, attaching with piping gel.

10 Create 4 medallions. Attach one on the top of the base tier using piping gel. One should be centered on each side of the square second tier.

{tier 2}

11 Roll black gumpaste through the pasta machine on setting No. 5. Cut out dots from the paste using the end of tip #2A. When cutting the dots use a twisting motion, since the tip does not have a sharp edge. Push the dots out of the tip using a ball tool. Brush edible glue onto the back of each dot and attach them to the square tier in a random pattern. For the pearls, make a sausage of black 50/50 paste the size of the 10mm mold. Lay the sausage over the mold, open the mold like a hot-dog bun, and press the sausage into the mold. If excess paste rises above the mold, trim it off using scissors. Turn the mold over and open it so that the pearls release. Pipe a line of piping gel along the base of the cake and attach 4 sections of pearls approximately 8 inches long. Leaning up against the cake, the pearls will be supported by the gel.

12 The finished tier reveals a simple, but chic, polka-dot and pearl design. Balancing a quick design element with a more complicated technique, like that of the base tier, is important to the overall working design, making this cake commercially viable as a saleable product.

{tier 3}

13 Roll black 50/50 paste on setting No.2 and place it on a piece of fun foam (purchased at craft stores). Texture the paste using a damask roller. Cut it using the Multi Ribbon Cutter prepared with 1 large spacer. Eight 4-inch strips are required. Cut a scalloped edge for the top of each strip using the Straight Frill Cutter. Turn each strip over and brush with a little edible glue. Using the square tier as a guide, attach the strips to the cake. Place one strip at each corner, and then one in between. Make a hollow between the scallops at the top of each strip and inset a 4mm black dragée with a dot of piping gel. Roll out additional black gumpaste on setting No. 5 and cut out daisies using the Fruit and Flowers Set. Attach each to the cake using piping gel or royal icing. Hollow the center of each daisy and attach a 4mm white pearl using piping gel.

Nicholas Suggests: When using textured rollers I always use a piece of fun foam under the paste as a cushion, thus producing a more clearly defined pattern.

14 Pipe a small shell border between the strips at the base of the cake using black royal icing and tip #3.

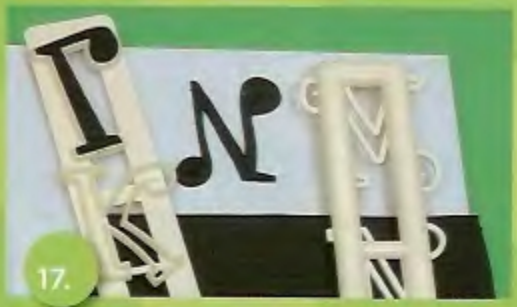
{tier 4}

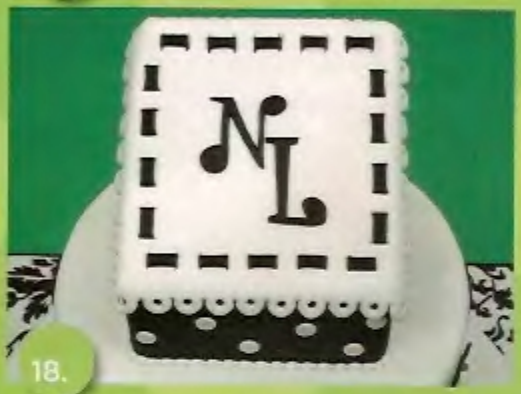
15 Roll out 70/30 white paste and cut it into a 5 1/4-inch square. Cut scalloped edges using the Straight Frill Cutter, trying to make the piece as symmetrical as possible. Cut eyelet holes into the frill using tip #7. Spread piping gel on the top of the tier, and position the white square on top. When rolling out the white paste do not make it too thin, as the black fondant will show through thinly rolled paste. Fold the edges down and, once dry, clean up any rough edges on the scalloped edge by running around it with a straight pin.

16 Make a 3 1/2-inch template from the pattern on page 46. Copy, cut out and place the pattern on top of the cake, then mark each slit line using a metal knife tool to designate where to insert gumpaste ribbons. Roll black gumpaste on setting No. 4, place it on Fun Foam, and texture the paste using a Gros grain-textured rolling pin. Cut the paste with a strip cutter to make Grosgrain ribbons, then cut these into 18 sections 3/4 inch long. Place cut ribbons into a plastic flap to prevent drying. Start inserting one end of each ribbon into a slit, and then slot the other end into the next slit. Repeat until all ribbons are placed.

Nicholas Suggests: Sometimes gumpaste ribbon pieces are dried over a curved surface for insertion but, with this cake, I wanted a lower profile for the ribbon pieces, so I inserted them while soft.

17 Roll black gumpaste on setting No. 5 and cut out a monogram or initials using the Funky Letter Set. Dry for 2-3 minutes and attach to top of cake with a little piping gel or edible glue.

18 Roll out white gumpaste on setting No. 4 and cut out dots using the end of tip #12. Turn the dots over and brush with edible glue before placing them on cake in a random design. Once again, these are white dots on top of black paste, so the white paste must be thicker (setting No. 4) to avoid seeing the black through the white. Pipe a small shell border around the base using white royal icing and tip #3.

{finishing touches}

18. Pin Grosgrain ribbon around the edge of the cake board, starting to the right of the cake front. Insert 2 pins to secure the ribbon and wrap around the board, pulling firmly, and attach with 2 more pins. Trim the ribbon end. Cut ribbon to lengths of 6 and 2 inches, then and construct a tailored bow using a low-temperature glue gun to secure. Attach the bow over the pins fastening the ribbon with the same glue gun.

MODERN CLASSIC

My inspiration! Above are classic design elements such as damask, paisley, and polka dots with a classic modern spin create a "Modern Classic" cake.

This is a display of cakes (right) all inspired from the same design elements. Adding bright apple green to the classic black-and-white makes a stunning, modern combination.

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BOOK REVIEW

Dream Wedding Cakes

by Debbie Brown
Alister Thorpe, photographer
B. Dutton Publishing Ltd., England, 2008
112 pages. $25.00

Debbie Brown lures us to joyful and modern wedding cakes and their minis; stylish without flowers. She wishes to give the decorator and clients, "a break from...flower making." The step-by-step instructions, tips and notes for her ten beautifully photographed cakes are clearly written, and emphasize attention to detail.

In A Fine Romance, a Juliet stands at a balcony's balustrade, as her prince proposes on a lower balcony. Each detail of the balconies, the groom and his betrothed—including hair, arms, shirt, bodice, and roses--are painstakingly described.

Ganesh's Blessing, honored at Hindu ceremonies, is a majestic cake of three large pillows resting on a golden pillar with Ganesh sitting in lotus position on the top cushion. Each aspect of his head and arms and the sweets and other accruements is precisely described. The highly detailed Mouse Party has decorated parcels, a gray top hat, and merry mice rejoicing. The instructions for the charming New England Chapel, time consuming but worthy, are meticulous. Two designs—60's Love and the Beetle Love—celebrate the funky art of the 60's and the passion for the vintage Beetle automobile.

An inspiring, challenging and encouraging book.

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The following recipe was provided by Softasilk Cake Flour for baking great-tasting cakes. However, cake flour can be substituted for all-purpose flour in any cake recipe. *Use 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons of cake flour for each cup of all-purpose flour in the recipe.*

Toasted Hazelnut Cake with Cinnamon Cream Frosting

2 2/3 cups Softasilk® cake flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup cold coffee
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
1/2 cup shortening
1 2/3 cups granulated sugar
3 egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup hazelnuts, toasted and chopped
Cinnamon Cream (below)
Additional chopped hazelnuts, if desired

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease the bottom and sides of 2 round pans, 9x1 1/2 inches, with shortening then flour lightly. Mix flour, baking powder, and salt; set aside. Mix coffee and milk; set aside. Beat butter, shortening, and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium speed until fluffy. Beat in egg yolks. Beat in vanilla. Beat in flour mixture alternately with coffee mixture, beating after each addition until smooth. Stir in nuts. Pour into pans.

Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes; remove from pans to wire rack. Cool completely. Fill and ice the cake with Cinnamon Cream Frosting. Sprinkle with nuts and, if desired, garnish with cinnamon sticks. Store covered in refrigerator. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

Cinnamon Cream Frosting

1 cup powdered sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
2 cups whipping (heavy) cream
1 teaspoon vanilla

Mix powdered sugar and cinnamon; set aside. Beat whipping cream and vanilla in a chilled medium bowl on medium speed until slightly thickened. Gradually beat in sugar mixture until stiff peaks form.

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THE UPDATED ART OF Chocolate Painting

By: Chef Laurél Silverberg
Photos: Craig Gustafson

[preparation]

When handling chocolate: Wear cotton gloves to prevent fingerprints from forming on the surface. Temper couverture chocolate or melt confectioners' coating. Prepare chocolate-masked mini-cakes and petit fours by molding the chocolate shells, layering the cavity with icing and cake, then pouring chocolate on top to fill the mold. Scrape across the top of each cavity to create a flat bottom, and allow to set. The 1-inch cake tier should be filled with solid chocolate. Unmold and stack the cake tiers, using a warm flat metal surface to melt the bottom of each to affix. Dust each finished cake or petit four with pearl dust for a beautiful sheen.

[essential elements]

Couverture or confectioner's coating
4 inch round mold, 1 1/2 inches deep
3 inch round mold, 1 1/2 inches deep
2 inch round mold, 1 1/2 inches deep
1 inch round mold, 1 inch deep
Petit four molds (Sweet Expressions)
Sponge cake layers
Buttercream icing
Cotton gloves
Bench scraper
Nonstick pan
Pearl dust
Soft, full-bodied, round brush
Styrofoam plates
Gel coloring: royal blue, brown, green, purple or violet and white (Americolor)
1/8–1/4-inch, round foam daubers (craft store stencil dept.)
Vellum sheets
Blending Powder (The Sweet Palette)
Liner brush
Water
Flat brush #6 or #8
2-cavity rope mold (First Impressions Molds)
Rolled-fondant icing
Gold dust
Clear alcohol or lemon extract
Grape oil-based flavoring
Confectioner's glaze
Gumpaste or Tylose powder
Small rolling pin
Small ivy plunger cutter

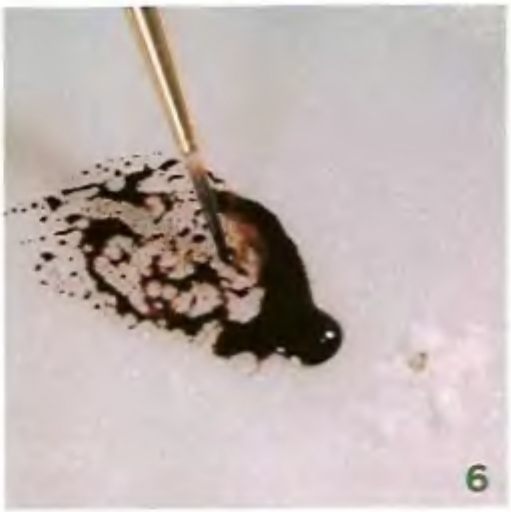
1. Using the Styrofoam plate as a palette, dispense a pea-sized pool of each desired gel-coloring hue. To create grapes, dip one side of dauber into royal blue and the other side in purple or violet.

2. Practice on a piece of artist's vellum before working on the cake/petit fours. To create the grape circles, lay the color-loaded dauber on the surface, rotate 1/4–1/2 turn, and lift.

3. After producing consistent grapes on vellum, reload the dauber to work on the cake. This time, dip the loaded dauber in a small amount of blending powder.

4. Return to the palette to blot the coloring and blend it with the powder. Make a few grapes and observe how the coloring behaves. If the gel mixture is not shrinking away from the plate, it is ready to apply to the chocolate surface. If this does happen, pick up more blending powder with the brush and repeat loading until the mixture sticks to surface.

Laurel Suggests: Use only Styrofoam plates for preparing coloring. This non-porous surface reacts the same way as chocolate. Another tip—if you paint the chocolate and are not happy with the results, it can be wiped clean with a clean sponge and water! Make sure the surface is dry before beginning anew.



CHOCOLATE PAINTED PETIT FOURS

5. Using the same daubing technique, paint a grape cluster on the surface of a petit four. Begin at the top, with the widest point and work down toward the tip. Overlap grapes with each new row and taper to a point. Leave space at the top of the cluster for foliage and vines.

6. Blend brown gel and water with a liner brush to create paint with an inky consistency. Add some blending powder and mix again.

7. Using the loaded liner brush, add a stem and tendrils to the painted grape clusters.

8. Load colors for foliage onto a #8 flat brush. Dip one corner in green and the other side in white. Pick up a small amount of blending powder with the coloring-loaded brush.

9. Work the bristles of the loaded brush back and forth on the plate, blending colors together for an even transition from white to green across the brush.

10. Each art brush has 3 parts: the handle, the bristles, and the ferrule, which connects the former together. With the prepared brush, apply leaves to the grape clusters. To paint the leaf, touch the toe (tip of the bristles) to the surface and apply lateral pressure until the bristles lay flat on the surface and the ferrule is nearly touching the surface. Drag the brush away from the point of contact while drawing the bristles gradually away from the surface. Toward the end of the stroke, add a slight twist at the wrist to taper the leaf and lift the brush away.

11. Pack the rope mold cavity with tan fondant. Release from mold, then brush with a mixture of alcohol and gold highlighter. Secure the rope around the petit four base as a border, trimming the end at an angle, with the grain, to form an imperceptible join.

Laurél Suggests: I use water or clear corn syrup to attach borders.

CHOCOLATE PAINTED MINI CAKES

12. Reload the dauber with gel colorings for grapes and then dip into blending powder. Paint grape clusters on the bottom two tiers of the mini chocolate-covered cakes. Notice how the painted image flows down the cake side over the different levels and angles. Use the #8 flat brush to fill in the clusters where the dauber cannot reach.

13. Add stems and leaves in the same way each was brushed onto the petit fours.

14. Add grape-flavored oils to purple fondant and mix. Roll small, round circles of this paste and build a three-dimensional cluster on top of each mini cake, as shown.

15. When satisfied with the grape cluster, brush it with a coat of confectioner's glaze. This adds sheen to the grape skins.

16. Using a small amount of tan fondant, roll a tapered stem with a wide base. Shape the base around a spherical object similar in size to the grapes, then add it to the top of the uppermost grape in the cluster.

17. Knead Tylose powder into leaf green fondant or created a blended paste with equal portions of the green fondant and gumpaste. Roll out the paste with a small pin. Using a small ivy plunger cutter, create leaves. Highlight each with the gold/alcohol mixture.

18. Add leaves to the grape clusters, pinching and tweaking the lobes of each leaf to add motion.

19. Mold a larger, tan rope to border the base tier and the small rope for the third tier, between the painted and modeled grape clusters. Brush each with gold highlight and attach to the cake.

16

17

20. Completed ensemble. Mini cake is sitting on a painted glass candleholder. I glued a 5-inch, glass circle to the candleholder throat with E-6000 adhesive. The painted wine glass and petit four plate were painted using the same techniques with glass and ceramic paints (these are available in any craft store). Set the paint permanently on these items with the following directions:

1) Allow painted items to dry for an hour.
2) Place items on a cookie sheet covered with parchment paper.
3) Place the items in a cold oven and set temperature for 350°F.
4) When temperature hits 350°, set timer for thirty minutes.
5) When time is up, turn off the oven, leaving glassware inside until completely cool.

Laurél Suggests: To assure food safety, I paint designs on the underside of clear plates—known as reverse painting. As an alternative, place food items on a paper doily to keep it from contacting the painted surface.

The grape clusters selected for this project were chosen to introduce these techniques. Here is a similar setting that demonstrates the layering and depth that can be achieved with more advanced technique. The final presentation is truly elegant and eye pleasing. Edible art!

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Stylish Party Purse

A chic handbag is always the perfect accessory—at your side, or on a cake.

Cake: Steven Stellingwerf
Photos: Craig Gustafson

[essential elements]

8-inch, round cake tier
11-inch round cake drum
Drum covering if needed
Edging ribbon, if desired
Rolling pins
Rolled-fondant icing
Gel coloring: black
Tips: #2, #3, #7, #12, #172, and various round
Assorted round cutters
Royal icing
Parchment or pastry bags
Dot Explosion Texture Sheet (CK)
Patterns, page 46
Fun Foam
Rotary cutter
Art brush
Waxed paper
Saltshaker
Angled forceps

1. Roll out a thin sheet of black rolled fondant. Cut out several dozen black dots with the piping opening of tip #7. These dots will be used to spell the name/message on the cake top. The letters on this cake ranged from 9 to 14 dots each. Thin white royal icing to a softer consistency, but not so thin that it runs freely. Fit a bag with tip #3 and pipe a small dot at the center of each fondant dot. Allow these to dry for 12-24 hours before applying to the cake.

2. Roll out more of the black fondant, then cut 3 circles using the back end of tip #172. Then using the back end of tip #3, gently impress a smaller ring within each circle. Cut out 2 eye holes in the center of each button using the piping end of tip #3. Allow the buttons to dry completely on a flat surface.

3. If an embossed pattern is desired for the purse, roll out a sheet of fondant slightly thicker than 1/8 inch. Place an impression mat on top, then roll across the mat with firm, even pressure to emboss the pattern.

4. Lay the front pattern from page 46 on top of the fondant. Use a rotary cutter to shape the piece. Create the remaining pieces in the same way. In total, the purse requires: 1 front, 1 back, 2 sides, 1 top, and 1 front flap. The patterns include three options for the flap.

5. Place the newly cut pieces on fun foam to dry evenly. Once the pieces have dried, brush with luster dust.

Steven Suggests: This cake will also work using buttercream as the base icing. Just be careful in choosing the colors. Intense shades may bleed into the buttercream.

6. Assemble the cake and cover with your choice of rolled icing. Roll out black rolled fondant to a thickness of 1/8 inch and cut various-sized circles using an assortment of piping tip sizes and round cutters. From the larger circles, cut off-centered, round holes.

7. Working carefully to avoid stretching and distorting the shape, move the first circle to a piece of Fun Foam. Wet the backside with a brush or a water pen, then press firmly on the cake. Apply additional circles randomly on the cake sides until a balance is achieved between black dots and white space.

8. Pipe a line of royal icing on the side edge of the purse front using tip #3. Set the piece on waxed paper, leaning it against a saltshaker for support.

5. Place the newly cut pieces on fun foam to dry evenly. Once the pieces have dried, brush with luster dust.

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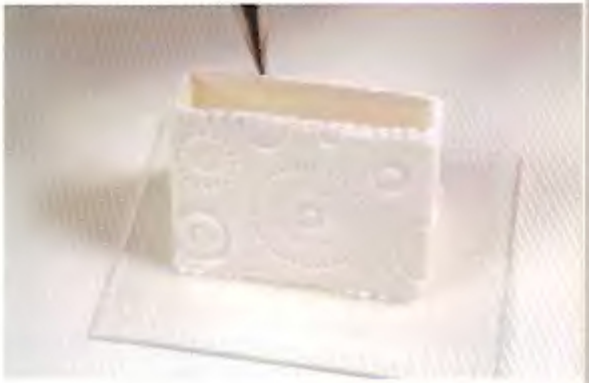
8. Pipe a line of royal icing on the side edge of the purse front using tip #3. Set the piece on waxed paper, leaning it against a saltshaker for support.

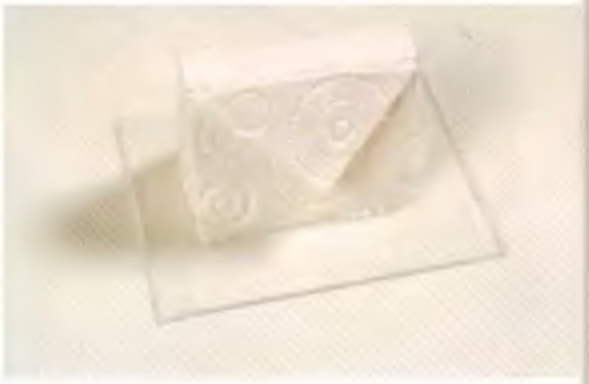
9. Pipe royal on the lateral edge of a purse side, then attach it to front. Allow the icing a few minutes to set, then remove the saltshaker and add the back and remaining side.

10. Pipe a line of icing around the top edges of the purse sides. Set the purse top into place on the wet icing.



11. Pipe 2 dots of royal icing on the front of the purse, near the top.

12. Pipe a line of royal icing on the top edge of the front flap. Attach the front flap to the top edge of the purse front. The icing dots will hold the flap out slightly from the rest of the purse.



13. Using black royal icing and tip #3, pipe a fine bead border along all the edges of the purse. Allow the border icing to set up before continuing.

14. Cut a strip of fondant for the purse handle. It should be as wide as the purse top and twice as long. Trim the handle to the desired length and attach to the purse top with a dot of white royal, allowing it to drape down the back. Before attaching the second end of the handle, give it a half twist, so it stands out from the body of the purse.

15. Attach buttons to purse with dots of black royal icing. Place one over each end of the handle and a third at the tip of the flap.

16. Once the purse has dried thoroughly, pipe a line of royal icing around the bottom side of the purse and position the purse on top of the cake. Using a forceps with an angled tip, position the prepared dots on the cake top to spell out the honoree's name. Once the spacing is correct, lift each dot with the forceps and place a small dot of royal icing on the back before returning it to the cake.

17. Pipe a shell border around the base of the cake with royal or buttercream icing and tip #12.

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Floral Splendor

Inspired by "The Language of Flowers" contestants at the 2008 Grand National Wedding Cake Competition offered a plethora of petals.

Often subtle, sometimes intriguing, and always beautiful, cakes at the 2008 Oklahoma Sugar art Show's Grand National Wedding Cake Competition illustrated the elegant "Language of Flowers."

Although the symbolism of flowers dates back through antiquity, the practice of expressing close-held emotion through gifts of flowers thrived during the Victorian Era. As the ultimate symbol of the wedding celebration, it is only fitting that the bride's cake be wedded to this tradition in expressing the occasion's beauty and joy.

Keeping in mind that different sources put a slightly different spin on the meanings, we offer here a selection of cakes from the competition, including the flower symbolism of the top prize winners.

Grand Prize winner, Rebecca Sutterby's cake was entitled "Innocence." The predominant flower was daisies, which are commonly understood to convey the same idea. The daisies were supported by white freesia (innocence), cosmos (modesty, pure love), blue flax (happiness), lavender heliotrope (devotion).

"Essence of the Tropics" won First Prize and was created by Loydene Barrett, combining plumeria (love, perfection) with white ginger (love, comfort) and bamboo (loyalty).

Busy Lizzies, more commonly known as impatiens (felicity/impatience), adorned the Second Prize cake by Kim Payne entitled "Busy Lizzie's Wedding Plans."

Grand Prize

Rebecca Sutterby, Savonberg, Kan.
"Innocence"

First Prize

Loydene Barrett, Coweta, Okla.
"Essence of the Tropics"
(Top, left)

Second Prize

Kim Payne, Cheyenne, Okla.
"Busy Lizzie's Wedding Plans"
(Top, right)

Third Prize

Amelia Carbine, Logan, Utah.
"Love Letters"
(Right)

Amelia Carbine's cake, entitled "Love Letters," featured excerpts from actual letters exchanged by her grandparents while they were courting. The floral accents included magnolias (sweetness, beauty, and perseverance) and oak leaves (strength, truth, steadfastness, and virtue). Supporting the cake was a custom-cut metallic oak-leaf platter.

Fourth Prize and honorable mention went to Diane Holgate's cake "Hope Springs Eternal" featured colorful irises (wisdom, faith, hope) and a golden fleur-de-lys motif. In Greek tradition, iris is translated as "rainbow" and names a goddess that was the keer of the rainbow. The fleur-de-lys is a stylized iris that has been the symbol of Florence, Italy and more famously, the French monarchy.

"The Secret Garden" by Gary Silverthorn placed fifth and also earned Honorable Mention. The cake's floral notes include: tiger lilies (prosperity), forget-me-nots (true love, hope, remembrance), pink roses (grace, beauty, love), and ivy (love fidelity, trustfulness).

Additional flower meanings and symbolism can be referenced at http://www.livingartsoriginals.com or in the book Tussie-Mussies by Geraldine Adamich Laufer (1993 Workman Publishing).

The 2009 event takes place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 3-4, with the wedding cake competition taking "Of Sea and Shore" as its theme. Visit www.oklahomasugarartists.com for more information about competing or attending the event.

Fourth Prize, Honorable Mention
Dianne Holgate, Farmington, N.M.
"Hope Springs Eternal"
(Top, right)

Fifth Prize, Honorable Mention
Gary Silverthorn, Kimball, Mich.
"The Secret Garden"
(Bottom, right)

Ruth Rickey, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Gold Certificate, "A Letter to Maxine"

Jennifer Matsubara, Springdale, Ark.
Gold Certificate, "Exotic Enchantment"

Carolyn Mangold, Hondo, Texas.
Gold Certificate, "Fountain of Love"

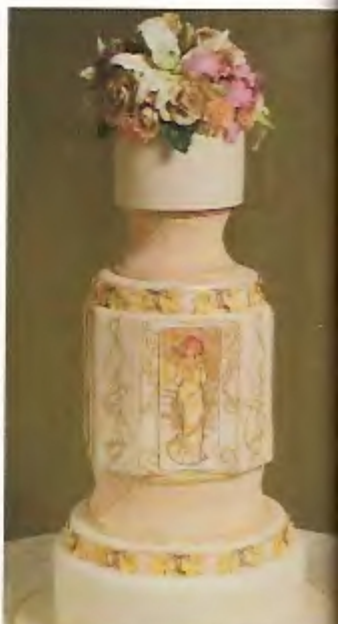
Carol Lowe, Auburn Hills, Mich.
Gold Certificate, "Waltz of the Flowers"

Lisette Vergara, Austin, Texas.
Silver Certificate, "A Timeless Belle"

Elizabeth Dickson, Bossier City, La.
Silver Certificate,
"True Love's Happy Enchantment"

Flora Aghababyan, Las Vegas, Nev.
Silver Certificate. "Bride of Paradise"

Lisa Bugeja, Ajax, Onterio, Canada.
Silver Certificate. "Camellia Couture"



Kaycie Lackey, Brentwood, Tenn.
Silver Certificate. "Muncha's Flowers"

Brides Magazine Features OSSAS Cakes

Not only were the cakes captured for ACD, a handful of talented designers had cakes that were selected to appear in the 75th anniversary issue of *Brides* magazine.

Eleven competitors form the 2008 Oklahoma State Sugar Art Show were selected by Wedding Style Director, Maria McBride to have their cakes photographed for Brides magazine's 75th anniversary issue.

"One of the things that sets a wedding a part from a regular party is a magnificent cake," stated Brides Editor in Chief Millie Martini Bratten in the the magazine's announcement of the 75th anniversary issue's release. The announcement noted that the cakes chosen drew inspiration from a wide range of sources, then praised the designers, stating, "The creators really reached for the stars when putting the finishing touches on their designs, some used roses from their own gardens, hand made feathers and others were even hand painted—all proof that if you have talent, imagination, butter and sugar, you can rise to new heights."

Cakes appearing in the issue were created by Lisa Bugeja of Ajax, Ontario, Canada; Flora Aghababyan of Las Vegas, Nev.; Rebecca Swoffer of Kimball, Mich.; Glenda Galvez of Wichita Falls, Texas; Kim Payne of Cheyenne, Okla.; Rosemary Galpin; Rebecca Sutterby of Savonberg, Kan.; Mary Ann Moy-Hochstetler of Cottage Grove, Minn.; Dianne Holgate of Farmington, N.M.; Loydene Barrett of Cowetta, Okla.; and Lisette Vergara of Austin, Texas. Show Director Kerry Vincent and her husband, Doug Vincent drove the cakes three-thousand miles, round-trip, from Tulsa to New York and back.

Kerry Vincent and Maria McBride, Brides Wedding Style Director, push cake boxes to the loading dock. They made it safe after 1500 miles of some very bad roads and nasty potholes - phew!

"Two years ago Kerry Vincent invited me to be a judge at the Tulsa Competition and I was happ to participate, it was an eye opening experience," sa McBride. "I was delighted to discover that there were s many talented sugar artists represented.

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Appliqué Vines & Blossoms

cake MaryAnn Moy-Hochstetler
photos Craig Gustafson

Cheery, appliqué-like styling, creates a simple, versatile design.

[essential elements]
4-inch, round cake tier
6-inch, round cake tier
8-inch, round cake tier
10-inch, round cake drum
12-inch, round cake drum
Hot glue gun
7/8-inch white ribbon
Cake cards to match tier si
Rolled-fondant icing
Royal icing
Parchment or pastry bags
Tip #4
Gel coloring: sky blue, brow
green, orange, and red
Small rolling pin
Rotary cutter
Ruler
Craft knife
Water/clear alcohol
Art brushes
Small leaf cutter (ATECO
Flower & Leaf set)

[preparation]
Center the smaller cake drum on the larger drum, securing it in place with hot glue. Cover the drums with rolled fondant and set them aside to dry. Bake, fill and assemble the cake tiers, masking each with a layer of rolled fondant. Stack the tiers on the covered drum using an appropriate support system. Color portions of fondant with three shades of blue, red, orange, and brown.

1. Pipe a snail's trail border at the base of each tier in brown royal icing using tip #4. Also pipe a border between the levels of the cake board.

2. Roll out brown fondant 1/8 inch thick. Use a straightedge to cut strips between 1/8 and 1/4 inch wide.

3. Use the blade of a craft knife to mark striations running perpendicular to the length of the strip. Cover the entire top surface of the strip.

4. Trim one end of the first strip into a point. Brush the back of the strip with clear, high-proof alcohol or water and position it on the side of the first tier to mimic the appearance of a woody vine. Add shorter, secondary stems that diverge from the main trunk. Each of these should begin with an angled cut to look like a natural fork. Continue in this manner around the tier, then decorate the remaining tiers with vines and stems.

5. Use blossom cutters in a variety of shapes and sizes to create flowers. Roll colored fondant to 1/8 inch thick, and cut several of each shape. In this design, each cutter was matched to a particular color.

6. Add striations to the blossoms, radiating out from the center.

7. Apply the blossoms to the cake sides, terminating each stem with a flower and adding portions of blossoms to random places along the vines.

8. Roll out a small portion of green fondant. Use a small leaf cutter to shape foliage for the cake. Mark the leaves with striations subtly radiating from the base.

9. Attach the leaves randomly in numerous places along the length of the vines and stems, brushing each with a hint of alcohol to adhere.

10. Roll small round spheres of orange fondant to shape centers. For each flower, the sphere should be smaller in diameter than the solid area at each blossom's center. Press the ball into the center of the appropriate flower with a fingertip, flattening each into a slightly domed disk. Use the craft knife to striate the centers, beginning along the center line and working to each side across the disk.

11. The finished design exhibits a crafty, country feel that could be equally at home at an informal wedding, a shower, or a significant birthday. In a one-tiered variation, run the vines up and over the top of the cake to create a frame for an inscription, or to fully cover its surface.

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Quick Ideas for Easier Decorating

From the International Cake Exploration Societé

Crumby Conundrum

To remove a crumb or a small piece of dried icing from the surface of a cake without marring the finish, **Lynn Robinson of Omaha, Neb.**, suggests using a piping bag fit with a small tip. Apply just enough pressure to allow a dot of icing to emerge from the tip, then gently pick up the crumb with the fresh icing and lift it away.

Outdoor Icing

Worried about bugs or particles sticking to the cake at an outdoor event? **Dede Reed of Aurora, Ill.**, suggests doubling the meringue powder in your icing recipe to give the finished surface a hard crust.

Visit ICES online at www.ices.org for more information about membership and the national convention.

2008 American Style Competition

On behalf of the staff of American Cake Decorating, we'd like to thank all the participants for sending in their entries. The results will be released in the April/May edition of ACD, and published in the May edition of Monthly Slice. If you haven't taken the time to register for the official monthly electronic newsletter of American Cake Decorating and Mailbox News, you can subscribe for free at www.americancakedecorating.com.

ICES 2009 Show and Convention Registration Open

Registration for the 2009 ICES Show and Convention began March 4. The show will be held in St. Charles Ill., July 30–August 2.

Registrations before June 1 are eligible for an early bird discount. To receive member rates for the event, attendees must have their membership dues paid through the run of the show. To join or renew membership, the organization requires five days for processing an application before registration, and recommends allowing enough time for this before any deadline.

As is tradition, the show is the largest annual gathering of international cake-decorating talent in the United States, with four days of demonstrations, 18 hands-on classes, hundreds of cakes on display, scores of international suppliers, and plenty of opportunity to network.

Full registration includes admission to the cake exhibition hall, the vendor hall, the vendor showcase on Thursday evening, the breakfast meeting on Friday morning, and the banquet on Saturday evening. Demonstration tickets can be purchased with registration or on site for $7 each, while seats in the hands-on classes cost $50.

To register for the event, visit www.ices.org, or for current information about the event, visit www.ices09.org

IDDBA Dairy Deli Bake '09

The International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association presents Dairy-Deli-Bake '09 "The Show of Shows" in Atlanta, Ga., June 7–9, 2009.

The show's lineup includes speakers: Gen. Colin Powell, former Secretary of State; Jeff Noddle, CEO Supervalue; Bob Knight, former college basketball coach; and Alton Brown, Food Network personality. In addition the show features the 14th Annual Cake Decorating Challenge, where three finalists fill three days worth of orders to see who comes out on top.

Visit iddba.org for more information about the show, including how to enter the competition and the complete list of registered exhibitors.

2009 American Retail Bakery Expo

The 2009 American Retail Bakery Expo will be held in Charlotte, N.C. October 18–20.

The event will include a wide variety of learning opportunities, according to the organization. Vendor demonstrations, technical demonstrations, seminars, hand-on classes and competitions will all be available to attendees.

The 9th Annual RBA Pillsbury Grand Champion Creative Decorating Competition pits decorators against each other in head-to-head preparation of a range of cake designs. Contestants compete in the following categories during the two-day event: Flowers and Sprays, Wedding Cake, Rolled Fondant, Custom Designs, Sculpted Cakes, and Creative Decorating Free Style.

All contestants must be members of the Retail Bakers of America, must work full-time or part-time in a retail bakery, and have a minimum of four years of decorating experience.

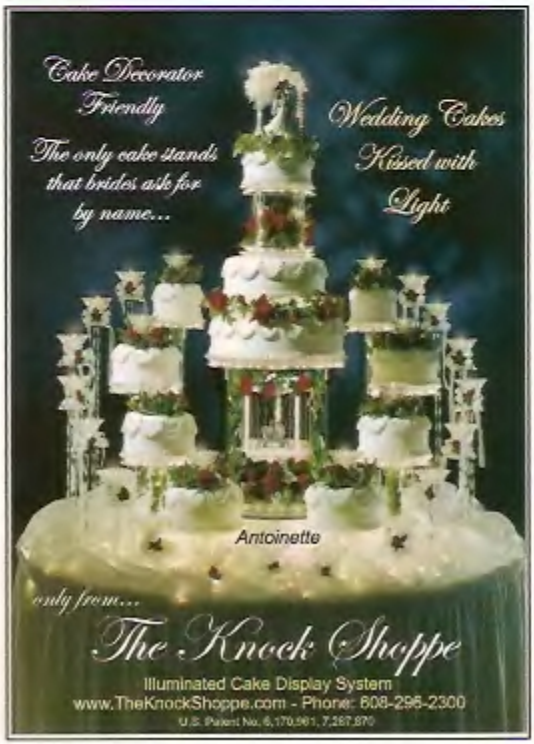
At the same time, the 2nd Annual Cake & Bread Extravaganza gives all membercake decorators and bakers a chance to test their skill against the rest of the industry. Dummy cakes and breads will be judged by a panel of experts in a variety of categories. Contestants will be divided into two classes for Students & Beginners and Intermediate & Advanced. Categories include Wedding Cakes, Novelty/Specialty, Tiered Cakes, and Decorative Breads.

- Wedding Cakes— Cakes with two or more tiers: Cakes may be butter cream, fondant, or chocolate with any type of decorations.
- Novelty/Specialty: Any non-tiered cake with a theme such as a Birthday, Anniversary, Christmas, Easter, etc. Any sugar medium or technique may be used.
- Tiered cakes: non wedding cake - Cakes with two or more tiers. Any sugar medium or technique may be used.
- Decorative Breads: any decorative, artisan or show piece type bread

For more information about the show and competitions visit www.rbanet.com or email: info@rbanet.com.

Vergara, Carnes Claim Best of Show in Austin

Best of Show winners at "That Takes the Cake" show in Austin, Texas March 1 included Lisette Vergara of Austin, Texas, for her depiction of traditional drums entitled "Latin Rhythm" in the music-themed showcake competition, and Lorie Carnes of Cakes Amoré in Plano, Texas for her piece entitled "Bronze Arabian" in the divisional competition.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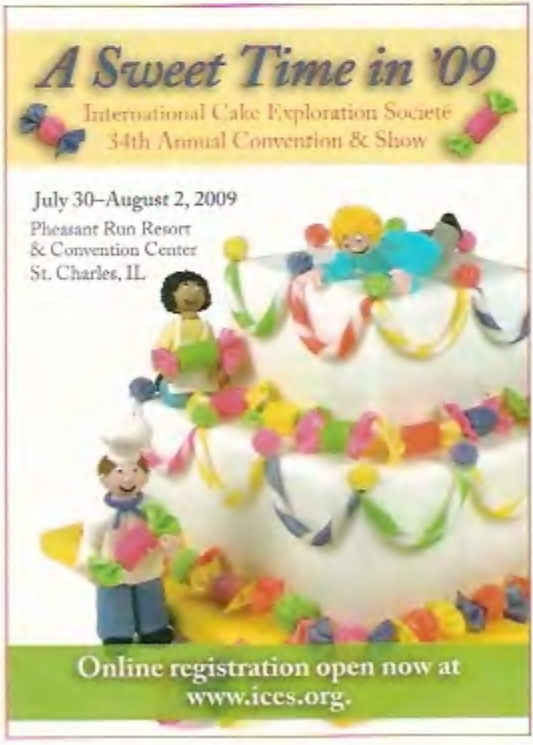


by Bronwen Weber

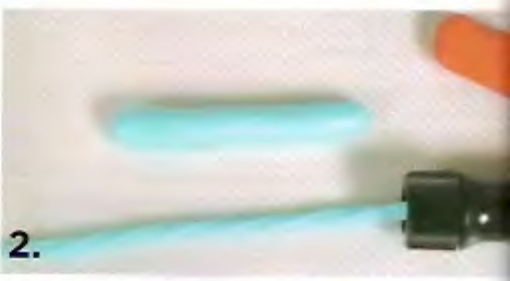
Sugar Gun!

When I first discovered the sugar gun, I was blown away. I was in awe over just how fast you could shoot out those decorations. Since then, this gun (also known as an extruder) has become an integral part of my decorating arsenal. A little fondant, softened with shortening, one of these pistols, and the scope of possibilities is tremendous. Alright, back on target! The aim of the following tips is to improve the caliber of your cake decorating. Here are but a few of the possibilities in side designs. So give it a shot, it is a barrel of fun!

1 Here, you see the complete set. I can assure you, the only hard part about this tool is keeping track of those little pieces. When I first got mine, I tried all the dies. I made a big pile of noodly looking things and was so impressed with myself. I suggest the same for you. Sit down and try all the little pieces. My favorite is the square, because you just couldn't possibly have rolled a square rope. People are mystified.

1.

2 So how do you use it? Well, roll an egg-sized piece of fondant and knead in a touch of shortening; 1/8 teaspoon or so, just until it is shiny. Roll into a log shape thin enough to fit through the barrel. Unscrew the end of the gun, and insert the fondant log. Attach your die of choice and screw the cap back on. Push the plunger until it compacts the fondant slightly. Now start squeezing the red handle back and forth. In moments you will have your own fun factory. Above, I used the square die, then I twisted it and you can see the result.



2.

3 Two sets of swags are shown hanging on the side of a cake; one set shaped with the square die and one with the round. I twisted the strands made with the square die. I find it easiest to spritz the back of each swag with a little mister filled with water or vodka (a damp art brush also works well) before attaching them to the cake. The trick to perfectly even swags is to make them longer than needed, then hold the ends and allow gravity to form the perfect swag for you. Bring the suspended swag into contact with the cake side to attach.

3.

4 This technique also makes stripes so simple! For this effect, I used several different dies and made a random stripe pattern. Once again, I used gravity to my advantage. Hold the strand by one end, letting it hang, and then bring the strand gently to the cake's side. I trim them all at once, after all the strands have been placed, not after each strand is added.

4.

photos Craig Gustafson

5 Figured out what the clover dies are yet? Ropes! To make a rope, twist one end of a strand upwards and the other end downwards with your fingertips. These ropes are perfect for making delicate loops between swags. How do you join two ends of a rope together seamlessly? Cut the rope diagonally with the grain. Do the same for the rope you want to join. The diagonal cuts join with the help of a damp art brush to make a seamless rope.

6 Tassels! For these, I use the die with the smallest holes. I squeeze out a 2-inch section and cut it off the gun with a spatula. Roll a ball the size of pea, then mark vertical lines in it to mimic the top of a tassel. Join these two pieces together with a piece of a strand made with a single hole. Use a damp art brush to attach the pieces together.

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[Clockwise from top left]

Diane Burke of Newington, Conn. decorated 15-, 12-, 9-, and 6-inch round tiers for an elegant wedding. Each round was covered in white fondant and accented with fondant pieces painted with a mixture of gold luster dust and vodka. Each tier was surrounded by a gold ribbon. The middle tiers were separated with pillars and decorated with red roses.

A bridal hope chest was created by **Deneen Ciancaglini of Springfield, Pa.** She started with a 11x15 sheet cake covered in pink buttercream, then topped it with a second stacked sheet cake. The layer was covered in cream-colored buttercream and impressed with a lace mold. The box lid was Styrofoam covered with the fondant and attached to the cake with wooden dowels. Inside the hope chest were edible pearls and a fondant garter belt, shoes, and hankie.

This vibrant wedding cake was created from four rectangular tiers by **Casey Giannini of Roanoke, Va.** The tiers were iced smoothly with white buttercream, and the base of each was surrounded by ruffles, created with tip #401, and beads created with tip #10. Gumpaste orchids airbrushed in green draped over the top and sides of the cake.

Cathy Fiebe of Patchogue, N.Y., covered sugar cookies w rolled fondant to create beautiful wedding favors. Textur rolling pins were used to create designs on the fonda and delicate icing flowers added the finishing touch.

A colorful Easter cake was crafted by **Denise Bones Berwyn, Pa.** She iced the round in green buttercrea then piped a variety of designs in pink, orange, yell and purple buttercream with tips #2 and #4. A wh fence surrounded the sides, piped with a basketwea tip. Colorful buttercream flowers and Easter bunnies f ished the design.

This elegant wedding dress was created for a brid shower by **Becky D'Andrea of Crystal Lake, Ill.** The b tom cake tier was baked in a large hexagon pan and c ered with fondant. The main dress portion was baked a Wonder mold pan and carved, then covered in fonda The top of the dress was created by covering a Wilt doll pick, first with black fondant, then white fonda Fondant draping, pink fondant lace, royal icing pipin and a coating of luster dust completed the look.

[Clockwise from top left]
A topsy-turvy wedding cake made by **Edna de la Cruz of Orlando, Fla.**, combined fondant flowers, beads, and swags. Each of the four tiers was covered in white fondant and painted with pearl dust. White fondant roses, tulips, and calla lilies graced the top, while ribbons flowed down from each tier.

A 100th birthday was celebrated with this cake created by **Jeannette LaVergne of Orange, Texas.** Jeanette iced a sheet cake in cream-colored buttercream and added a white border with tip #5. The sides of the cake were impressed with a diamond mat, while a pink, textured fondant ribbon and bow encircled the cake. Buttercream roses and a message finished the design.

Laura White of Union, Mo. constructed a four-tiered round wedding cake, then covered each tier in smooth buttercream. A bead border ran along the bottom of each tier. Laura covered half of the cake in a lacy buttercream pattern, then dusted it with disco dust for sparkle. A fondant drape and gumpaste roses and leaves completed the design.

This cake resembling a spiral staircase was created by **Ed Atwood of Alexandria, La.**, for a rehearsal dinner. The pound cake was covered in a chocolate icing and surrounded by bars of chocolate drizzled with white chocolate. Each tier was embellished with strawberries dipped in white and dark chocolate, and the top tier featured a bride and groom strawberry couple. Fondant lilies accented the design.

"Square cakes with sparse flower arrangements seem to be the trend here right now," says **Kelley Farrell of Denver, Colo.** Her three-tiered creation was covered in buttercream and trimmed with brown ribbons. Decorative buttercream swirls accented each tier, while gumpaste calla lilies graced the top.

Melissa Dotson of Overland Park, Kan. used royal icing to create these lovely wedding cake cookies. Each cookie was smoothly iced with blue or white royal icing and allowed to dry. Decorative swags, dots, and hearts were then piped onto each cookie.

[Clockwise from top left]

Allison Lawless of McKinney, Texas, created a four-tiered square wedding cake for a local bridal show. She iced each tier in buttercream, then decorated the cake with hand-rolled fondant pearls, rosebuds, and geometric shapes. The cake was then painted with super pearl luster dust and topped with a gumpaste bow and flowers.

Pat Gosch of Cresco, Iowa created two adorable cakes for a wedding shower. Each cake was made from 10-, 8-, and 6-inch rounds. One cake was decorated to resemble a bride, with a white buttercream dress and hair piped with a star tip. The other cake was iced smoothly in black buttercream to mimic the groom's tuxedo and completed with buttercream facial features and hair.

Michele Movius of Fayetteville, N.C., designed this grand three-tiered wedding cake with 16-, 12-, and 9-inch rounds. Each tier was smoothly iced in cream-colored buttercream, then decorated with pink roses, leaves, and a shell border. At the top of each tier rested an arrangement of fresh flowers

Barbara Thexton of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, crea this "tea-for-two" birthday cake for a young girl. baked the cake in a Wonder mold, then iced it smoot in buttercream and piped a Cornelli lace pattern. Bar ra cut the handle and spout from gumpaste and topp the cake with icing flowers and a chocolate butte Cupcakes decorated to resemble the teapot rested gumpaste saucers.

Sorina Hagianu of Athens, Ga. crafted a chocolate Eas basket filled with colorful eggs. An oval cake was c ered in chocolate buttercream and trimmed with pip chocolate basketweave. Chocolate eggs were covere fondant and decorated with white royal icing using #1. Small eggs, ducks, and a rabbit were formed fr modeling paste, and Sorina piped colorful flowers w royal icing.

Erica Talorico of Sewell, N.J., created a martini-them cake for a bridal shower by smoothly icing a round buttercream. Black and white circles were created fr fondant, and the centerpiece was formed from a com nation of fondant and buttercream. Green-and-red f dant olives completed the design.

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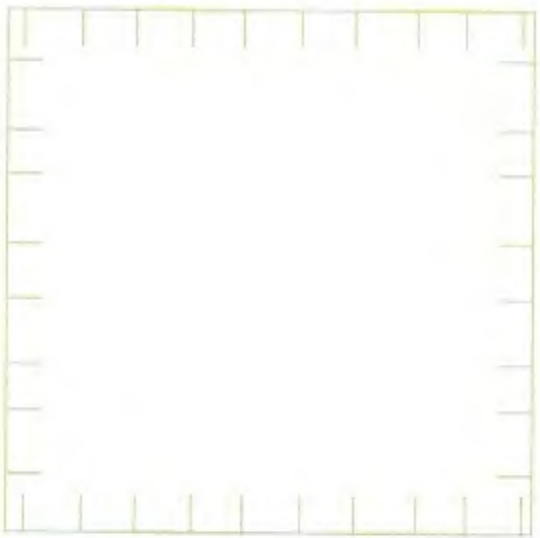


CAKE DECORATING

BUSINESS

48 Stories of Success

EAT YOUR ART

by Colleen Duffy

Delivering divine confections to Northwest Montana, where you can have your art and eat it, too.

50 Supply Side

LOGICPIC: CREATING BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CAKE MASTERPIECES

by Sheri O'Meara

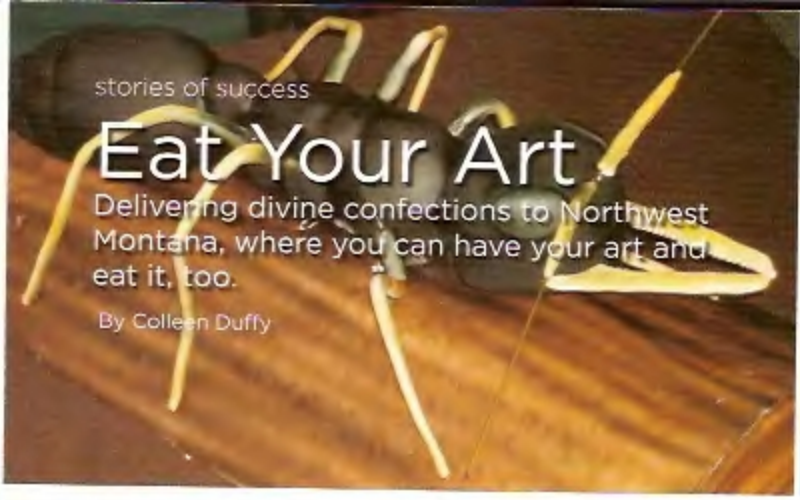
51 Forum

RING IN THE NEW!

by Carol Meres Kroskey

If there ever was a year that everyone wants to see in the rear-view mirror, it was 2008. But what's ahead for 2009?

Colby and Eric Wood of Eat Your Art in Kalispell, Mont., create artlike masterpieces for destination weddings aks and events on the border of Glacier National Park.



stories of success

Eat Your Art

Delivering divine confections to Northwest Montana, where you can have your art and eat it, too.

By Colleen Duffy

Home to equal parts logging, ranching, and tourism, as well as the unmistakable Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake nearby, Kalispell, Montana, is also where you'll find Eat Your Art and its purveyors, Colby and Eric Wood.

"Ten years ago, I was dabbling in cakes and had zero confidence in my own ability," Colby Wood said. "But I also had a strong desire to get better and a stubborn streak that wouldn't allow me to quit." And get better she did. Wood's cake decorating hobby, inspired by the idea of being the kind of mother who makes her kids' birthday cakes from scratch—much like her own—evolved into a home-based wedding cake and 3-D art cake business complete with a commercial kitchen and packed schedule, despite her remote location.

Early On

After Wood's daughter was born, the vocational counselor became a stay-at-home mom. Evoking her own childhood, she began making cakes for her children. "I just started drawing a picture on her first birthday cake," she said. With the arrival of her son three years later, she enrolled in the local community college's cake-decorating class for fun and learned about crumb coating, border techniques, and how to pipe various flowers. "I enjoyed the class and felt like I struggled less than many of the other students," Wood said. "My husband often laughs at me; many members of my family are very artistic and I used to lament that I didn't have an artistic bone in my body. He would say that I just hadn't found the right medium yet. After that class, I started to find reasons to make cakes!"

A birthday gift from her husband Eric furthered Wood's momentum. "One look—I said, 'You can do that with cake?'—and I was hooked." When the couple first started their cake business, Eric worked as head baker in a local bagel shop. This allowed them to borrow kitchen facilities while their own commercial kitchen was built.

Present Day

Offering all of Flathead County, and beyond, wedding cakes and three-dimensional art cakes, Eat Your Art operates by appointment only out of the small commercial kitchen located behind but separate from the Woods' home. "If I have to pull an all-nighter, I'm only a few steps away from the house," she said.

Wood is a one-woman show with a very involved and hardworking supportive cast: Eric and her children. She credits her husband for being her biggest cheerleader, and the one she turns to for new design ideas, as well as Eat Your Art's resident structural engineer. "When I need to figure out how to make a T-rex cake that stands on its two hind legs, we butt heads until we figure it out!"

Bread & Butter

Wedding cakes are the bread and butter of the business, making up 80 percent of the orders, compared to art cakes at 20 percent. Competition is often a concern in any industry, but fortunately the area—only a half hour from Glacier National Park, a large destination wedding location—attracts many brides. "There seems to be plenty of work for all of us," she said. "Our wedding season runs from May until October. My weekends during this time frame are insanely busy."

Eat Your Art has built its business primarily on reputation as opposed to major advertising and is known locally for creating great-tasting, over-the-top cakes. "We have worked very hard to keep an open, positive relationship with all the vendors in the area (including the other cake decorators). It's very flatterin receive a call from a bride who was ommended by many of the other dors she is working with. Brides and families tell me they chose me bec I was comfortable to talk to and fu work with."

The company also participates in var regional events: the local bridal expo, community college's Festival of Flav and donates to charity fundraisers.

Customized Art

While admitting that working for you can be a difficult, Wood relishes the f ibility. "But the biggest challenge I is getting people to connect art to fo they love the art but have difficulty derstanding that art takes time and t means money. They can't justify pay so much for something that is tem rary," Wood said.

"After many years of giving away time, I found that I was getting angry resentful so I had to decide to value time, even if that meant making fewer cakes. People see no problem in pay their car mechanic $60+ per hour the cost of parts. I too have a specializ set of skills and abilities—unfortunate still don't get $60 per hour. My pric however, now reflect what I consider for the area I live in.

"I don't take on whole lot of sma cakes; since everything I decorate scratch-made, I can't compete with grocery store or Costco—nor do I w to," she continued. "I have found t most people don't plan ahead, except the larger milestones in their lives. Si everything I do is custom, per orde can't cater to the last-minute crowd."

Rural Ops

Operating from a small town within a rural area—Kalispell is about two hours northwest of Missoula—dictates various aspects of operations for Eat Your Art, including the type of customers Wood works with, the cake designs they request, and the means in which she obtains her supplies.

She lets the art speak for itself when it comes to promotions. "Living in a more rural community means that I have a smaller population base to work with. Fewer people means fewer high-end customers but many of our customers come as a direct result of a recommendation from someone in their own circle of friends who has had one of our cakes."

The local tastes also impact Eat Your Art's creations. "I've dabbled in sugar sculpture and chocolate work but there's not much call for it around here."

What is called for are cakes inspired by outdoor activities, scenery, and wildlife: hiking, hunting, fishing, skiing, the mountains, lake, river, deer, elk, bear, etc. For every cake there is a story—a story about the people and why they want a cake to help commemorate whatever milestone they are celebrating.

When coming up with design ideas, the Woods try to develop new designs instead of repeating the same work. "Although, there are some cakes I end up doing over and over—the rainbow trout is a favorite."

Wood touts her website as an invaluable tool, allowing people from all over the nation to check out Eat Your Art and her style of cake decorating. "We use the website a lot. I'm not a hard-sell kind of person. I like to direct people to the website, let them look at my previous work, review the general price range, and if they are interested, they'll call back." Additionally, Wood must seek out specialized products like chocolates and decorating supplies on the Web.

"The area also influences the style of cakes people are looking for and what they are willing to spend. By the same token, I have been able to be the primary innovator of cake as art in my area; that has its own rewards," she said.

Looking Ahead

Kalispell isn't exempt from the nation's problems, though Eat Your Art hasn't yet felt the recession's impact. "I do think that the present day economy will effect what people are willing to splurge on. I will probably be doing fewer art cakes and smaller wedding cakes for a while."

For now, however, the Woods continue to provide Northwest Montana with Eat Your Art creations. They're also planning to develop a line of fair-trade chocolates and expand both chocolate and sugar work. "I originally got my degree in Social Work so that I could save the world, now I'm happy with being able to make it a little sweeter!" CDB

"I used to lament that I didn't have an artistic bone in my body... I just hadn't found the right medium yet."

Top Five Business Tips from Colby Wood:

1. When opening a commercial kitchen, start with the local Health Department—those are the people you have to please first and foremost.

2. Build your business slowly, step-by-step. In order to build a reputation, we gave away a lot of cake in the beginning but we knew we had to get our product out there for people to see before we could start charging more for our time.

3. Educate your clients. You can't compete with the grocery store prices because you make everything from scratch—your frosting doesn't come in a five-gallon bucket.

4. If you mess up, own it and make it right. Customer service is everything in this business.

5. If you can take a class from anyone, take it! You can always walk away with something.

Catching Up With Logicpic

Creating Building Blocks for Cake Masterpieces

by Sheri O'Meara

Laina Caise
owner and manager of Logicpic

It was only after dabbling in a variety of businesses that Laina Caise, owner and manager of Logicpic, turned to the cake industry. But after owning a tanning salon, co-owning a computer retail store, working in a family-owned heating and refrigeration business, and serving as a product merchandiser—Caise had worn enough hats to put her in good standing in Logicpic. Now she is in charge of production, development, sales, and (what she deems her most important role) customer service.

Started in 2004 in response to a need Caise saw in the cake industry, Logicpic sells drums, boards, and support systems for cakes. Cake artists including Scott Clark Woolley and Verna Chluspa use Logicpic drums and boards.

American Cake Decorating caught up with Caise to learn about her business:

ACD: How did you get started?

LC: I started cutting cake boards for my family and friends in 2004. It soon became apparent to me that the material that was available to me at that time was not the ideal cake board material. I did research. I wanted a clean, matte finish, white, washable, oil-resistant, lightweight material that would be strong, and not flex under the cake, and that would not require a covering to use.

After months of research, I found a company that would manufacture a high-impact, polystyrene-faced foamcore board to meet my specifications. Once I found the proper material, I felt that the cake industry would appreciate and want this new material for cake boards.

ACD: How has the business grown?

LC: In 2005 I set up my website to provide cake professionals and amateurs with professional-looking cake boards in the shape and size that they need. I quickly added creative support systems for cakes, and cupcake stands that would work with my new boards and separator plates. My modular cupcake support system also will work for floating-tiered cakes and crooked floating cakes. All board shapes are cut utilizing a computer-aided cutting system.

ACD: Why this business?

LC: I enjoy the beauty and elegance of decorated cakes, and wanted to contribute in some small way to the process. I wanted to be the solution to a problem. I felt that the cake industry had a void. It needed a source for quality cake boards cut into the needed sizes and shapes. This was something I could do and contribute to the industry. These cake boards would be the canvas for cake artists to create a masterpiece on. It is like the foundation of a building; it goes unnoticed by everyone but it is one of the most important building blocks for a successful structure.

ACD: What's unique about your products?

LC: Our cake boards are cut from our high-impact polystyre foamcore board with solid polystyrene white matte covering both sides. They are strong, clean, washable, waterproof, oil-sistant and can be sanitized. No foil or contact paper covering required. You save time and money.

Our support systems are based on a center support. The cake s port uses a center stabilizer dowel rod to keep each tier center and to prevent shifting during transportation. Our modular cen support system is for cupcake stands, floating tiers, and crook floating tier cakes. It uses any size and shape of 1/2-inch th separator plates to build the type of support you may want. sections screw together for easy assembly.

ACD: What do you love about this industry, and your business?

LC: There is always something new and different. I enjoy meeti the many talented and caring, giving people in this industry. I en being a small part of a very large industry.

ACD: What are the biggest challenges of the business?

LC: Keeping the cost down, and the quality up.

ACD: Biggest rewards?

LC: Customer satisfaction and interaction. I love all the phot graphs of the finished cakes that our customers share with us, a listening to the excitement in their voices when they talk abo our products.

ACD: Best memories?

LC: Having Scott Clark Woolley ask us to create and produce product for his distribution.

ACD: What are you doing differently with your business this yea

LC: This year we plan to add a line of Heat V's and Heat Tub to our product list. Use these products in cake pans to promo even baking while shaving minutes off the total baking time quired. We would like to assist other creative people getting th products exposed to customers by helping them in sales and d tribution. We are based on creating a solution, and if others ha a quality product, we will consider promoting their products a handle sales and distribution for them.

For more information, visit www.Logicpic.com. **CDB**

Ring in the New!

If ever there was a year that everyone wants to see in the rear-view mirror, it was 2008. But what's ahead for 2009?

by Carol Meres Kroskey

While it might seem to be a cliché, 2008 represented the best of times to some and the worst of times to others—and often both to everyone. Investors counted their riches as the stock market hit record heights. But, while some also made money again betting against the market on the way down, most of us gritted our teeth when we dared to open financial statements later in the year. Owners of hard assets, such as oil, wheat and corn, enjoyed record-breaking revenues, as the growth of the global economy seemed unstoppable. Then, they saw all their gains evaporate—and then some—when the commodity bubble burst. While many homes went into foreclosure in 2008, others were snapped up by folks who saw prices finally coming down to more-reasonable levels. And, if these gyrations weren't dizzying enough, consumers faced the spectacle of watching some of the biggest banks and industrial companies disappearing—or asking the government, "Brother, can you spare a dime?"

Yes, 2008 was a roller coaster of a year. The question is, is the ride over yet, or are there more climbs, dips, hair-raising turns and loop-de-loops to come?

Fun times to own a business

Prudent business owners know that whether the 2008 books end up showing red or black ink, keeping a close eye on the overall economy—and a closer eye on factors that individuals actually can control—is going to be more important than ever. After all, not every business went under during previous economic debacles, including the Depression. It was during that era that consumers and business people alike learned that if you watch the pennies, the dollars take care of themselves.

Unfortunately, there are operators who were unlucky enough to have locations in communities where customers literally are surviving day to day. Some of these businesses continue to struggle along. However, others have closed their doors for good, so owners didn't lose their own life savings chasing a dying dream.

On the other hand, the survivors can emerge from the current crisis stronger than ever because all the fat will have been burned away, and all those competitors are gone.

As luck might have it, owning a bakery or cake-decorating shop means you have a business that's infinitely adjustable. You can choose to offer affordable luxuries and serve as large a clientele as possible. You can decide to downsize, either temporarily or permanently. You may want to delight customers with creations beyond their wildest dreams, limiting yourself to projects that challenge you, but also reward you well. Or you can experiment until you find a happy medium somewhere along that spectrum that serves your customers' needs, while still bringing you a profit.

Among the important tasks that the beginning of every new year brings—and especially this new year—is evaluating the sources of your income and your outgo. Because some of these are under your direct control, evaluating the sources of your revenues and expenses is your first line of defense.

For example, in 2008, some business owners were reluctant to raise product prices when ingredient prices shot up. Instead, they may have added a "fuel surcharge" on products and on deliveries, an increase that could be reduced or eliminated when gasoline prices came down from the stratosphere. Other owners did adjust product prices as needed, confident that customers understood the necessity and were willing to pay more for quality products—and keep their local baker in business. These owners may have chosen an across-the-board price increase, or they may have limited the price rise to selected products.

Some bakers and decorators re-evaluated the range of products they offered and decided to cut out the less-profitable items. As a result, they were able to hold the line on labor costs, as well as to show more profit on less overall volume. Others found ways to streamline the production process, making more variety from a basic mix, for example, or producing and freezing larger batches for greater efficiency.

Shopping around for supplies, comparing prices among different suppliers, and keeping tighter control over inventory paid off, too. For bakers who could count on frequent deliveries, a "just-in-time" ordering system prevented too much cash from being tied up in supplies, such as packaging or decorating kits. For owners in more-remote areas, turning to restaurant supply houses or warehouse clubs proved to be a helpful strategy in controlling costs.

Even simple acti

ons can save money on energy bills. For example, bakers installed motion detectors to turn off lights in areas not frequently used, such as storage rooms. Turning the thermostat to a higher temperature in summer or a lower temperature in winter, or installing a programmable thermostat to control temperatures in unoccupied parts of the business, can make a difference, as well.

So, it seems as if the watchwords for 2009 are "do more with less." That's never a bad thing, but especially important if you want your business to greet 2010 next year.

Seri Lopez
SeriousCake.com
West Linn, Ore.

When Seri Lopez opened her baking and cake decorating business, SeriousCake.com in West Linn, Ore., on December 18, 2007, little did she know what an "interesting" year it was going to be. Yet, as she celebrated her one-year anniversary in 2008, she was in the black.

This illustrates, somewhat, the advantages of being a relatively small business. "I have a state-licensed kitchen and studio in my home," said Lopez. "For me, 2008 was an exciting year, and I'm excited about 2009. We all have challenges that have to be overcome, but I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to start something new and to have a business of my own.

"Of course, I'm still in the building phase. Fortunately, I was able to create cakes for my friends and family for 6 years before opening SeriousCake.com, so I did my homework. Also, I'd been working in the business world for 32 years, and spent time selling Pampered Chef products at the same time, so I learned a lot about partnering with customers, marketing and sales, and offering good customer service.

"My business is specialized. I create cakes, cookies, sugar flowers, and chocolate work. My studio, where I hold tastings and do my design work, is open by appointment only. I don't want to get too big, so I only take as many orders as I can handle. I offer only quality work and I want to be sure clients get what they really want. I feel the joy in this business every day, and I want to keep it going without becoming overwhelmed and losing the quality of the art in creating custom cakes."

As with any new business, Lopez faced the challenge of getting her name out, especially since established competitors had their own good reputations among customers. "I think it's important to advertise," she said. "People need to see your name or to hear about your products. But since 2008 was my first year in business, I didn't want to go into debt, so I did what I could afford.

"My husband, Jeff, had encouraged me to quit my full-time job and open SeriousCake.com, and his ideas have been key to my success. For example, he had me put together a website using a professional web designer, so I'm able to showcase my cake designs. Next, we worked out ideas about communicating with clients by marketing via e-mail, mailings, and radio advertising.

"I worked with local radio stations. I did buy some advertising, but I was also able to work out some trades. I provided cakes for special occasions, and in return, I received advertising. For 2009, I also have ads in a local and national bridal magazine.

"It wasn't all smooth sailing last year, though. A couple of commercial accounts cancelled holiday orders because they were over budget by year-end. The good news is, they're rebooking in 2009. There have also been one or two brides who discovered a need to adjust their budgets. We all see this in business during economic challenges.

"I've tried to apply the lessons I learned over my business career to my baking business. For example, budget, budget, budget. I always kept track of what I needed to purchase and what I was paying for supplies, and I only bought what I needed for the immediate future. It's easy to overlook the accounting when you get busy, but watching your expenses is important.

"Being small can be an advantage because the business is not too complicated, especially because I don't have any employees and can control my overhead. On the other hand, it can be a disadvantage, because I don't get the price breaks on supplies that larger businesses get. So I'm always careful to look at what things cost, look at what I have on hand, and watch the bottom line.

"When gasoline prices were so high, I had to be a little cautious in how I handled delivery charges too. I deliver within a 30-mile radius at a flat rate, so I added a per-mile charge over 30 miles. I always try to be fair, depending on the extra cost of fuel.

"However, there are times when I've gifted a cake to a couple that really couldn't afford a wedding cake. Being a small business gives me the opportunity to do this. But you really have to know when your client is having a true budget problem or whether it's just someone trying to get the lowest price.

"I have a baseline price per slice that ers the cost of ingredients and basic w The price goes up from there, based the time and materials needed for a ticular design. Because I'm the new on the block, I want to offer unique signs. But, I still have brides who brin a photo and want an exact duplicate, that's fine too. To me, customer ser is a key element in keeping a busi growing and making it better.

"People appreciate having 100 per of your attention and your commitm to making a celebration the best th can be. I believe in answering e-m right away, and in putting together g proposals when designing cakes. I think it's important to say 'thank you clients, so I sent out holiday cards to them know how much I appreciate th and value their business.

"I have orders on my books for Ja ary into the summer months, and I confident that 2009 will be a good y I plan to continue looking ahead, pl ning based on phone calls and ord taking my time, ordering only wha need, and not overextending myse only know what I can control, and I' blessed about what has been acco plished so far."

Bill Moore, CMB
Linne's Bakery & Café
Shelbyville, Ind.

One off year isn't going to put Linn Bakery & Café out of business. After there's been a Linne's Bakery since 18 first in Danville, Ill., then in Shelbyv Ind., since the mid-1930s. This bakery seen it all, and it's still doing business der the stewardship of Bill Moore, w bought the bakery in the mid-1980s.

Says Moore, "2008 was pretty strong us. Fortunately, we have a loyal custom base, with people who stop in four five times a week. They know that I do compromise on quality, so if I have raise prices, they know why.

"Both my employees and my customers know that I'm fussy and cranky when it comes to product quality and customer service. My customers work hard for their money, especially in this economy. My employees know that I want to make sure they get their money's worth. They also know that I'm not happy if a product doesn't pass my visual inspection when it goes from production to the store. To keep me happy, the bakers and decorators do it right.

"That keeps customers happy and makes it easier for the store personnel to give them good service. I insist on good customer service, because customers are the ones bringing money to our business so we can pay our employees' salaries. So, I encourage my employees to treat our customers well and find ways to make shopping at our bakery a good experience. For example, if a customer has parked a block away and needs help with a package, my employees know it's okay to carry that package as far as necessary.

"But customer service also includes being careful about expenses so you don't have to pass along the costs to them. When ingredient costs rise, you need to find ways to manage those costs so you can stay in business but still be fair to your customers. I was in the bakery business in the mid-1970s, when the cost of sugar went up from $22 a bag to $75 a bag almost overnight. So I know that you have to take a careful look at your product prices to make sure you're not losing money.

"We still make things 99 percent from scratch, so when the prices of raw ingredients go up, we can tell what the effects will be on particular products right away. Although I did have to raise prices on products like pastries, we didn't raise any of our prices on decorated cakes. My customers already pay more for my wedding, birthday, graduation and other special-occasion cakes than they would at the local supermarket or warehouse store. I don't want to discourage customers by having to charge them even more for cakes. Instead, I want to find ways to reward them for their loyalty.

"Still, once you raise prices, I don't think it's a good idea to lower them again, because that volatility might be back. Instead, now that commodity prices have come down a bit, I plan to do some product promotions with eye-catching prices in the early part of the week. For example, I might take 50 percent off on certain products or offer 'buy one, get one free' promotions. I want to maintain the customer count in the early part of the week, so I like to do these specials on Monday and Tuesday. Of course, every once in a while, it's good to have a similar promotion on Friday and Saturday, so you can reward those customers too.

"I'm lucky because I have customers who keep coming back, regardless of what's happening in the economy. People still like to celebrate, and they tell me they wouldn't consider it a holiday or a party if they didn't have a cake from Linne's.
"I did notice that we sold fewer dessert cakes for the holidays in 2008, but those are the kinds of products that customers can pick up less expensively from my competitors. On the other hand, we took a lot more orders for cupcake-style birthday cakes, because cupcakes have been a trendy product recently, and because they're a good choice for moms to send to school for kids' birthday parties. Because the cakes don't have to be cut, cupcake-style cakes are popular in offices too.

"Our half-sheet board holds 24 cupcakes. We ice the cupcakes individually first, so they're all completely coated, then arrange them on the board. We smooth on a thin layer of buttercream to connect all the cupcakes, then we can decorate this surface just like a regular cake. At $1.25 per cupcake, this half-sheet cake is a little less expensive than our regular half-sheet, making it a good choice when money's a little tight.

In fact, I think there's plenty of opportunity for new people to come into the bakery business, especially if they bake from scratch. I like that my bakery products taste different—and taste better—than products from the supermarket, and I think that's why we've enjoyed our customers' loyalty over the years."

Jerry and Dianne French
French's Cupcake Bakery
Costa Mesa, Calif.

"Well, 2008 was a fun year," said Jerry French, owner of French's Cupcake Bakery in Costa Mesa, Calif. After being in business for 33 years, Jerry notes that the bakery has been lucky, compared to other businesses in the area that have had to shutter their doors.

"Our customer count has been the same as before," he said, "and I'm happy with that. But because we could see what the economy was doing to our customers, we didn't raise prices, though we should have. We did wind up working harder and making a little less money than the year before, but we are still here, and still doing okay.

"Even without raising prices, we noticed that customers changed their buying habits. While our customers didn't stop buying products from us, we did see them cutting back on higher-end products. For example, we had more orders for regular layer cakes and sheet cakes, and fewer orders for cut-out or sculptured cakes. That affected our revenue, but we felt that it was important to keep customers coming back. So, we held the line on prices.

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"The problem with raising prices in 2008 would have been that everywhere else in our area, bakeries kept their prices the same. To raise prices would have been detrimental, especially when our customers haven't had raises or are reaching deeper into their pockets to make house payments. I didn't want to lose business, and frankly, I didn't want to go through all the work of raising prices, then see ingredient costs coming back down. In the end, while we did see those costs go up, they came back down, so the effects of not raising prices earlier in the year weren't so bad.

"Of course, the prices of ingredients haven't fallen back as much as they went up, so we did end up raising prices for our seasonal Christmas items. Despite that, our Christmas business was good. So, we'll take a closer look at whether we can raise prices on some of our other products if we need to.

"I've been in business long enough to recognize that baking always changes. A bakery owner has to be ready to make changes to keep the business going. In fact, we had a fire three years ago, and it took us 13 months before we were able to reopen. So this isn't the first time we've had to deal with setbacks.

"On the other hand, we have to be here for our customers. For example, caterers are hurting because their customers are cutting back.

Celebrations, like birthdays and weddings, still go on. The difference is that customers, who might have ordered cakes through their caterers, are coming to us directly now. Because we're not the middleman, customers know they're going to get good value from us.

"As for 2009, I think it's probably going to be more of the same, at least for a while. I think the higher-end products will continue taking a hit, but we'll adapt and make the products that customers can afford. Fortunately, our area didn't get caught up in the overbuilding that took place elsewhere around California. Even though home prices have come down quite a bit, there are a lot of long-term homeowners that don't have mortgage problems. I think if we keep the same customers who have been coming to the bakery for years, we'll be doing okay. Running a bakery is a lot more fun when you're making money, of course, but the business is fine right now.

"However, we had been thinking about selling the bakery. The state of the economy might have an effect on our ability to sell if loans are harder to get in the future. Meanwhile, we'll adjust our products and monitor costs so we can continue to take care of our customers."

Claudia Butler
Sweet Sensations
Grove, Okla.

As a shop owner in the resort town of Grove, Okla., Claudia Butler has steered Sweet Sensations through rough waters before. Running a custom bakery has allowed Butler to be captain of her own fate and not as subject to the rough winds of the economy. For example, she originally included catering in her services. But she discontinued it when catering proved to be less satisfying and more complicated than decorating cakes, for the amount of profit involved. Over the years, she has made both party cakes and wedding cakes, switching to wedding cakes exclusively, and adding back party cakes when wedding bookings were slow.

"Changes in the economy don't aff
me the same way as other business
she said. "Because I don't have a w
in business and I work alone, I only
cept as many orders as I can handle
addition, I can adapt my business m
easily because I can decide what ty
of products to offer. For example, I u
to make pies, but I quit doing them
cause I couldn't make them pay. C
rently, I'm considering whether to li
my business to orders that meet a c
tain minimum, whether it's a serving
or a dollar amount.

"Even before this rough economy st
ed, customers on marginal budg
didn't come to my shop, even thou
the nearest bakeries—except for W
Mart and the local grocery store—
about 25 miles away, because my pri
are a little higher. I make my cakes fr
scratch, using real vanilla, butter, cho
late and other quality ingredients. S
I had a good 2008 because I had a
of bookings that had been made in a
vance. For the most part, I was pre
busy, and in fact, December was my s
ond biggest month.

"One thing that did affect me was
spike in commodity prices. It wasn't
much the costs, as the fact that one
my major suppliers quit carrying c
flour. So, either I had to drive a long d
tance to pick up flour, or I would have h
to find the money and the storage spa
for a huge order from a different distri
tor. It wasn't convenient, but I manage
That's one reason I'm considering lim
ing my business to larger orders. I'd l
to be able to limit the amount of suppl
I have to keep on hand.

"I've also been more careful about bu
ing equipment. I have to ask myself,
I really need this for my business, or
it just a fun toy to have around?' For e
ample, I don't do many fondant cakes
I did more of them, I'd want to buy a fo
dant sheeter. But so far, I haven't talk
myself into buying one.

"For 2008, I think I'm going to show a small profit even though I didn't add a fuel surcharge and it cost more to bring in supplies. And it's hard to tell what 2009 will be like. I've had calls for bookings, but I see that some businesses in town are closing. Also, many of the people who have homes by the lake are retirees. Our cost of living here is much lower than back east or in California, but if these folks are depending on dividends or stocks for their disposable income, they might have to tighten their belts a little.

"On the other hand, we have a lot of destination weddings in the area, and I get orders via the Internet. Sometimes, I never even meet the brides. So the local economy won't affect these types of orders.

"I like to think of myself as a 'glass half full' kind of person. I'll continue to watch my expenses, and manage my time better by limiting orders to cakes that will be more profitable. As a result, I'm cautiously optimistic about 2009."

Nick DeSpirito, Jr.
Cake Specialty, Inc.
Hawthorne, NJ

"In my wildest dreams," said Nick DeSpirito, "I never would have imagined what happened in 2008." Of course, DeSpirito is talking about energy prices that zoomed out of sight, as well as commodity prices that ganged up on bakers. Fortunately, as a fourth-generation baker—his family started in the bakery business in 1919— DeSpirito has had some good examples to follow.

"People will always want to celebrate that once-in-a-lifetime event," he says. "So, even if they have to downsize their dream, customers will find a way to come up with the money for their celebrations. For example, a bride's parents might have to pay for the wedding cake instead of the bride herself.

"Lately, we've seen some interesting trends in wedding cakes. Some brides don't really care about the details, as long as the cake tastes and looks good. So, we've been able to tweak our designs to the bride's liking—and to fit her budget. We'll do anything they want, from very simple to very ornate. Of course, there are the brides who make a full-time job out of getting the exact design they want, but we're usually able to satisfy them. While it's not a good idea to turn down business, especially after the economy went crazy, we occasionally run into someone that can't be pleased. If we're putting in too much time and effort for someone that isn't going to be happy, we won't take that order.

"I think there's always going to be a market for upscale products, because some people will never be satisfied with just a sheet cake for a special event. So we're still seeing orders for sculptured cakes and other types of specialty designs.

On the other hand, we've felt that the business is down a little bit this year. We've noticed that people come in to talk about ordering a cake, but then they don't come back to confirm the order.

"It's hard to say what will happen in 2009, because I don't have a crystal ball. We still have people calling for appointments, and are taking orders for cakes using ballpark figures. But we don't finalize the order until we get the bride's final count, which usually doesn't come until about 3 weeks before a wedding.

"Fortunately, we also do some wholesale business with caterers and hotels, including wedding and birthday cakes. We ask that they fax over any weekend orders by Tuesday, so we can work them into our schedule. Because they provide steady business, we do offer a discount, which varies depending on the size of the cake. Working with them also provides us with good word-of-mouth advertising.
"We have a website that's helped a lot, especially when fuel costs were high. Customers could check us out before making the trip to the bakery. And we introduce ourselves to customers by doing wedding shows and other events like that.

"We did raise prices a little in 2008, because all our costs were higher, from flour to gasoline for deliveries. We didn't charge a fuel surcharge, though our distributors added one to our ingredient bills. I didn't want to do that to my customers, and we were able to hold out until gasoline prices came down again. But we can't count on low prices for gasoline forever, and although ingredient prices have come down, they're higher than what they were. For example, eggs are still higher than normal.

"Whether we raise prices again depends a little on whether our customers have the same disposable income. Unfortunately, we've seen a lot of layoffs in the stock industry, and we hear the state governments in New York and New Jersey will be coming to us for more taxes. It seems like everything is going up faster than income, so it's hard to tell how much customers will have left over to spend in bakeries.

"We do watch what the prices that other bakers are charging, because we don't want to price ourselves out of the market. But we do have to be able to pay our bills for raw materials and energy, and we have to pay our employees. So we take each week as it comes, keep an eye on costs, and realize that everybody is being put to the test. People will probably look for more bargains in 2009, but we've found that when they have a party or special event, they'll find a way. So will we." CDB

COMING EVENTS

March 7, 2009 El Sobrante, CA. Spring Micro Mini Classes. Call Tracy Wirta at 925/932-0436 or info@contracostacakeclub.org, or visit www.contracostacakeclub.org.

March 27-28, 2009 Burke, VA. The 2009 National Capital Area Cake Show. Call Delores Banks at 301/773-5343 or visit www.cakeshow.org.

March 28, 2009 Smyrna, GA. Destinations Wedding Cake Challenge. Call Elinor Negron at 404/697-7772 or visit www.daisysdesserts.com.

April 5-26, 2009 Williamsport, PA. Class with Kim Morrison. Call Tina Goodrich at 570/322-0700 or visit www.nwcook.com.

April 17-22, 2009 Tampa, FL. Potpourri of Flowers classes with Jennifer Dontz. Contact Jennifer at cakebabe1@aol.com.

April 23-25, 2009 Worcester, MA. Class with Maisie Parrish. Contact Caroline Barnett at 508/615-7270 or visit www.piskypixie.com.

April 24-9, 2009 Vancouver, Canada. Berries and Blossoms classes with Jennifer Dontz. Contact Jennifer at cakebabe1@aol.com.

April 8-9, 2009 Orlando, Fla. Class with Maisie Parrish. Contact Caroline Barnett at 508/615-7270 or visit www.piskypixie.com.

April 18, 2009 New York, NY. Workshop with Elisa Strauss, author of Confetti Cakes. Register at www.meetup.com/njcakedecoratorsclub, or contact Jessica Villacis at 201/238-5620 or villacisj@hotmail.com.

April 18-19, 2009 State College, PA. Pennsylvania ICES 29th Annual State Cake Show. Contact Kim Morrison at 814/422-8779 or gkmorrison@verizon.net.

April 18-19, 2009 Toronto, Canada. Potpourri of Flowers classes with Jennifer Dontz. Contact Jennifer at cakebabe1@aol.com.

April 24-26, 2009 Shelton, WA. Sugar Rocks Cake and Confectionary Show. Contact Meri Senaga at 253/653-8449 or swtelegnt@aol.com, or visit www.freewebs.com/wasscakes.

June 7-9, 2009 Atlanta, GA. International Dairy Deli Bakery Association Expo. Call 608/310-5000 or visit www.iddba.org.

July 2-5, 2009 Phoenix, AZ. World Pastry Forum Pastry and Wedding Cake Classes. Visit www.pastrychampionship.com.

July 4-5, 2009 Phoenix, AZ. National Pastry Team Championship. Visit www.pastrychampionship.com.

July 30-Aug. 2, 2009 St. Charles, IL. ICES 09 34th Annual Convention. Visit www.ices09.org.

Oct. 3-4, 2009 Tulsa, OK. Oklahoma State Sugar Art Show. Contact Kerry Vincent at 918/745-7125 or visit www.oklahomasugarartists.com.

Oct. 16-20, 2009 Charlotte, NC. American Retail Bakery Exposition. Call 703/245-8034 or visit www.rbanet.com.

See Your Event Here!

Announce your cake show, event, or class with a free listing in ACD. Listings are limited to one entry per event. Information must be received by April 15, 2009 for the Jun/Jul 2009 issue. Fax announcement to 651/653-4308 or send an email to editor@americancakedecorating.com.

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